

APAAC ANNUAL VICTIM ADVOCATE CONFERENCE

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VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Presented by:

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Resiliency in Victim Advocacy

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Activity

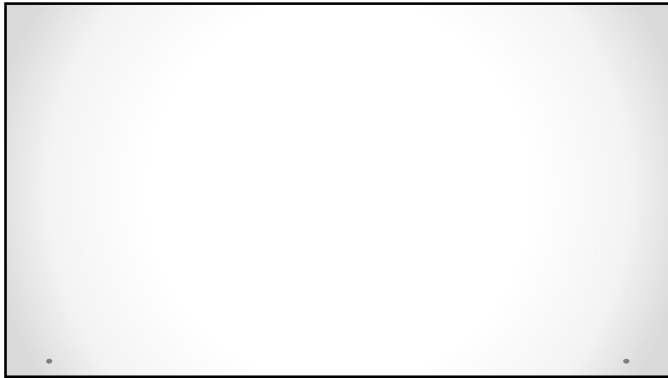
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Stress Test

On the next slide is an image of two identical dolphins. A study has shown that people under extreme stress will see a difference even though there is none.

What do you see?

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Occupational Hazards?

Vicarious Trauma
Empathy Fatigue
Burnout
Compassion Fatigue

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Burnout

- Emotional exhaustion
- Detachment
- Low sense of accomplishment
- Cumulative result of stress

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Empathy

- Empathic people FEEL the emotions of those around them through Neurobiological processes
 - Sharing suffering of others too much increased our own negative emotions
 - Increases danger of emotional burnout
 - **Neural plasticity**
 - Compassion training has shown to increase ability to cope with negative emotions
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22661409>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3524680/>

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Empathy

- Our brains "mirror" what see visually based on intent!
- It's not just the motor activity, it's the intent that matters
- These mirror neurons also appear connected to the limbic system (emotional system)
- When we mirror the motor activity of facial expression, it allows for emotional resonance (or empathy)
- It's not learned – it appears to be part of who we are.

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Empathy

- I sit with folks who tell me their stories
- My brain's mirror neurons fire automatically and to some degree I may experience what I'm hearing or seeing
- This empathic response is heightened if I genuinely care about the individual with whom I'm working

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Empathy

- Cognitive science suggests distracting the brain after viewing traumatic images lessens incidence of flashbacks – yes, they had folks play Tetris!
- Distraction is a common coping skill in the wake of crisis

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Vicarious Trauma

- "Secondary Trauma"
- Similar Symptoms as first hand exposure
- Similar neurobiology as primary trauma
- Multiple "exposures" stack up over time
- Distress is subjective

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What does Vicarious Trauma look like?

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance
- Disturbed sleep, irritability or increased startle response
- Cynicism/lack of hope
- Feeling down, tired, depressed
- Lack of interest in previously pleasurable activities
- Negative perceptions of work/self

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Vicarious Trauma

Accumulation of experiences that impacts us

- Emotionally (social withdrawal, feelings of despair/hopelessness)
- Physically (no energy for self, weight gain, alcohol/drug abuse)
- Spiritually (changes in worldview or beliefs)

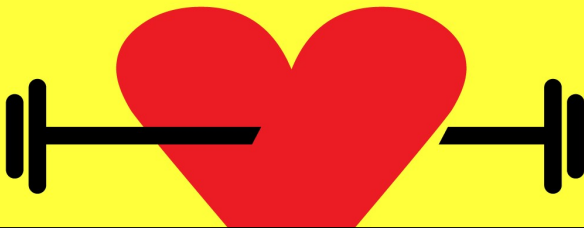
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The costs of Burnout and Vicarious Trauma

- Ineffective service provider
- Violating boundaries in helping relationships
- Withdrawing from family, friends, and colleagues
- Making bad judgments

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The intent to contribute to the happiness and well-being of self or others



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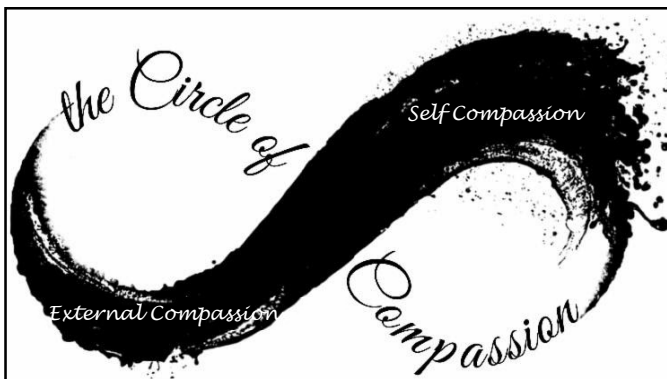
The Myth of Compassion Fatigue

- Compassion is NOT a finite resource, nor a commodity
 - Treating it as such teaches us to withhold compassion
 - Encourages "disconnection" (dissociation)
- Compassion is infinite
- Research has shown that compassion training increases resiliency

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Compassion is the key to Resiliency

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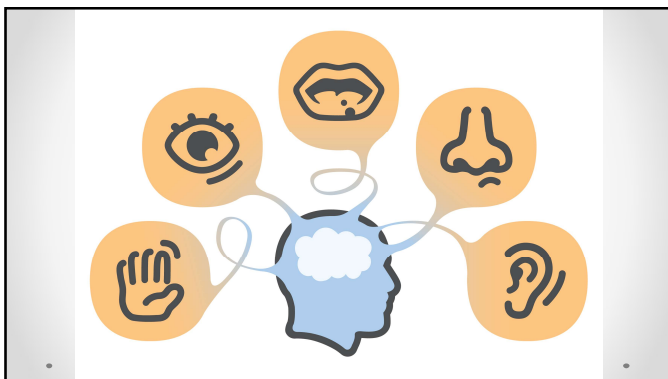
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Creating Resiliency through Compassion

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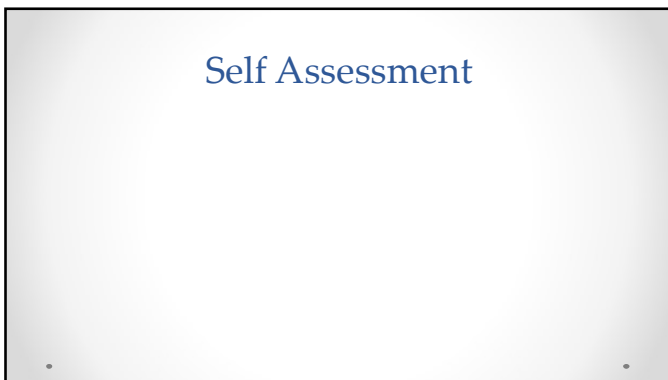
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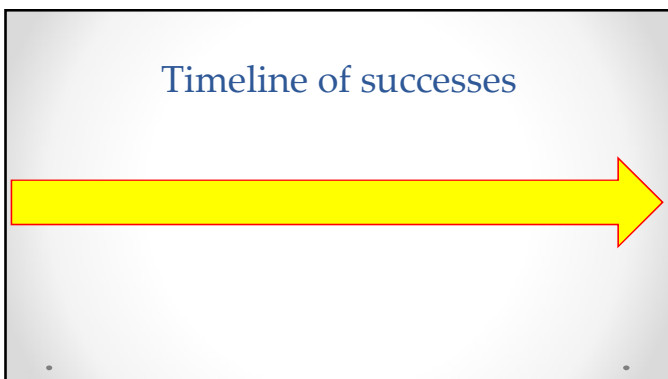
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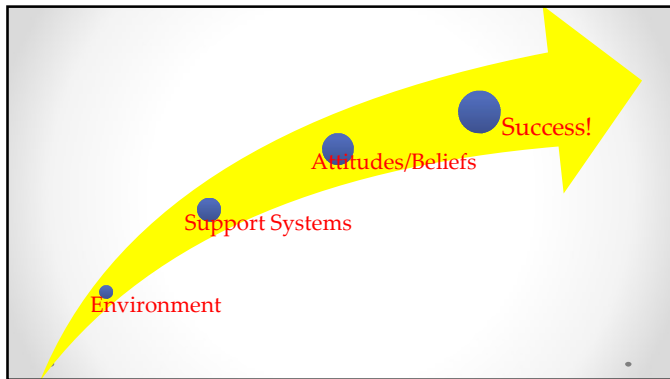
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Creating a Self Care Action Plan

- List your activities
- When will you know you need to do them?
- Do these activities lead to balance?
- Are you feeding your connections?

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Developing Your Own Self Compassion Plan

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Relax and seek solitude | • Read for pleasure |
| • Eat healthy foods | • Say "no" more often |
| • Tend to your spirit | • Cry |
| • Praise yourself | • Smile |
| • Enjoy yourself | • Exercise |
| • Sleep well | • Spend time with animals |
| • Self-reflect | • Take vacations |
| • Practice deep breathing | • Laugh |
| • Journaling | • Others? |

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Make Someone's Day (External Compassion)

- Sometimes the best way to support yourself is to support those around you!
- Do something special for someone around you.
- When was the last time you wrote and mailed a thank you card or letter?

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Create a culture of Compassion

TOGETHER,

WE can create a strong, resilient, meaningful
change through compassion

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